

VZCZCXRO8477
PP RUEHFK RUEHKSO RUEHNAG RUEHNH
DE RUEHKO #1378/01 0880758

ZNR UUUUU ZZH

P 290758Z MAR 07

FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2155

INFO RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEHAAA/THE WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RUEAWJA/USDOJ WASHDC PRIORITY

RULSDMK/USDOT WASHDC PRIORITY

RUCPDOC/USDOC WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC//J5//

RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI

RHHMHBA/COMPACFLT PEARL HARBOR HI

RHMFIUU/HQ PACAF HICKAM AFB HI//CC/PA//

RUALSFJ/COMUSJAPAN YOKOTA AB JA//J5/J021//

RUYNAAAC/COMNAVFORJAPAN YOKOSUKA JA

RUAYJAA/COMPATWING ONE KAMI SEYA JA

RUEHNH/AMCONSUL NAHA 2915

RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA 0452

RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE 3967

RUEHNAG/AMCONSUL NAGOYA 9793

RUEHKSO/AMCONSUL SAPPORO 1398

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 6363

RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 2439

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 3743

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 07 TOKYO 001378

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OITIP](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [ECON](#) [ELAB](#) [JA](#)

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ARTICLES:

(6) Six months after establishment of Abe administration: Prime minister finds himself on horns of dilemma due to hawkish aides

HIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Abridged slightly)
March 29, 2007

Hawkish lawmakers in the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) were supposed to flourish under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Instead, they inevitably have been drawn into numerous difficult policy skirmishes. Though they want to play up their stock hawkish arguments, such a play would cause discord with dovish LDP members and the New Komeito. Keeping silent would be a contradiction of

their efforts during the LDP presidential race to launch a hawkish Abe administration. They are troubled about how to deal with various issues under Abe, who has begun displaying his originality for pushing up his support rates.

"I don't want to hear about it anymore!" In mid-March, when the party's effort to revise the national referendum bill was at the final stage, LDP Policy Research Council Chairman Shoichi Nakagawa snapped at a leading conservative lawmaker, Keiji Furuya, who insisted on punishing civil servants who might use their positions at the time of a national referendum.

Nakagawa himself is a hawk, as evidenced by his concerted action with Prime Minister Abe in dealing with the history textbook and the abduction issues. Holding a key policy position, Nakagawa is no longer allowed to make arbitrary decisions. The policy chief lost his patience with Furuya for being too insistent.

The LDP and the New Komeito's policy chiefs assembled at an office in the Dietmembers' Office Building on March 28 to discuss the option of shortening the legal period preventing women from remarrying and other new exceptions to the Civil Law. Although the focus was on a judgment by Nakagawa who holds to traditional family values, the policy chief concurred with the option without raising any objection.

Prime Minister Abe is also struggling. Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Hakubun Shimomura indicated in a press conference on March

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26: "The military was not directly involved in recruiting comfort women." Hearing this, Abe wearing a wry smile said to LDP lawmakers: "What made him say such a thing?" Shimomura's comment came shortly after the Kantei's (Prime Minister's Official Residence) confirmation to abstain from making comments on the comfort women

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issue in the wake of the presentation of a draft resolution condemning Japan to the US House of Representatives.

Shimomura has been a member of the Group of Junior Lawmakers, the predecessor of the Group of Lawmakers to Consider Japan's Future and History Education, which is calling for a review of the Kono Statement.

Considering Japan's relations with China and South Korea, the government cannot review the statement so easily. The government's strategy has been to acquiesce to the group's call for a review of the statement, while abstaining from actually doing anything about it. Gaps have appeared in this strategy from time to time.

New Komeito Secretary General Kazuo Kitagawa, speaking to the press yesterday, criticized Shimomura, saying, "A deputy chief cabinet secretary is not in a position to express his own view." Aware of

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Shimomura's sentiment, Abe has not been able to warn him. "Moves by hawkish aides seem to be misplaced kindness toward the prime minister," an LDP executive noted.

How will they be able to demonstrate hawkish overtones without going overboard? A group of lawmakers including Furuya plan to establish in May a parliamentary league to promote value-oriented diplomacy to strengthen relations with the United States, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Taiwan, and other countries. Nakagawa intends to become its advisor, instead of playing a leading role in the group.

On March 23, a gathering took place at a Hotel Okura restaurant to celebrate the reinstatement of such postal rebels as Furuya and Taku Eto, who had been on friendly terms with the Ibuki faction (Shisui-kai), including Nakagawa and former Education, Science and Technology Minister Bunmei Ibuki, until the Lower House was dissolved over postal reform. Nakagawa, under the influence of alcohol, yelled cheerfully, "The Shisui-kai members share the same vision."

(7) Abe's policy imprint: Multifaceted diplomacy with concern also about state of Japan-US relations

SANKEI (Page 4) (Excerpts)
March 29, 2007

Jiro Otani

The six-party talks from the standpoint of the abduction issue should have been an occasion for Japan and North Korea to vie with each other to get the four other members on its side. As the United States further softens its stance toward North Korea, Pyongyang has insisted that "the stalemate in talks on the nuclear issue is attributable to Japan." The North's strategy is apparently to drive a wedge between Japan and the other member nations of the six-party talks. If the US and other members all soften their stances toward the North, Japan may find itself isolated in the six-party framework.

Foreign Minister Taro Aso said impatiently: "It's not Japan but North Korea that is isolated." Indeed, Japan has scored points in terms of dragging an inexplicable country like North Korea to accept multilateral talks. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Aso both have assumed a tough stance toward North Korea, rejecting any compromise with it because of the abduction issue. This attitude has achieved a

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successful outcome. Meanwhile, North Korea as well has succeeded in luring the US. Will Japan be left behind or will the North be isolated? These questions are yet unanswerable.

Prime Minister Abe paid a whirlwind visit to China and South Korea last October immediately after taking office and moved bilateral ties with those countries one step forward. He also has strengthened relations with Europe, India, Australia, and Middle Eastern countries, and he has generally broadened the spectrum of Japan's diplomacy. By doing so, Abe intends to win as many countries as possible to his side in dealing with not only security and economic issues but also such outstanding issues as the abductions and reform of the United Nations.

Japan has reached agreements with China and other countries to build strategic, reciprocal relations. But Japan and China remain unable to move forward because they have yet to overcome the strains remaining in the relationship.

"Why did this happen? The other side should come here next time." This way Abe scolded a senior Foreign Ministry official immediately after meeting with Chinese President Hu Jintao in last November in Hanoi, Vietnam. Abe's meeting with Hu followed the last one held while Abe was visiting China in last October, but what irritated Abe was that the meeting took place at a room of a hotel Hu was lodging at.

What irritated Abe was the fact that China successively provided the venue for talks with him. This signified that China had gained the upper hand over Japan. Abe's irritation came from a sense of humiliation that he had been easily taken in by China's psychological tactic.

Aso as well as Abe remains distrustful of China. Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing visited Japan in this February and asked the foreign minister, "How about visiting China?" This was the fourth time for Aso to be asked by China to travel there, but Aso again declined: "I have no intention to travel to China for just sightseeing."

Japan and China have a number of pending issues to be resolved, for instance, what to do about developing gas fields in the East China Sea. Aso deems it meaningless to patch things up in order to project a superficial friendship by playing along with China's "smile diplomacy."

On the other hand, Abe has delayed his visit to the United States. That may be seen as a manifestation of his "confidence" that

Japan-US relations are that firm and solid. In fact, one senior Foreign Ministry official said proudly: "The Japan-US alliance is so strong that it will not be affected by the delay in the prime minister's visit to the US."

However, discord has recently begun to emerge in the otherwise solid bilateral relationship.

With the Republic Party's defeat in the US mid-term elections last fall, President Bush, who cultivated a close relationship with former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, is now in a shaky situation. Commenting on America's Iraq policy, Defense Minister Fumio Kyuma said, "The Iraq war was a mistake," immediately arousing distrust among some quarters of the American society. On the "comfort women" issue, a resolution condemning Japan was introduced

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in the US House of Representatives. Some US news companies are linking the "comfort women" issue to the abduction issue.

A number of heavyweights in the US administration, including Vice President Cheney, recently visited Japan, and Aso has stressed that there has been no change in Japan's foreign policy centering on the Japan-US alliance. In dealing with the abduction issue, both countries have reaffirmed many times they will work together, but the irony is that the more eager President Bush becomes to resolve the North Korean nuclear weapons issue while he is in office, the further the abduction issue will be left behind, possibly undermining the trust relationship between the two countries.

Abe and Aso are expected to travel to the US in late April. Will they reaffirm the solidarity of the alliance and will they be able to stick to Japan's position, such as diplomacy toward North Korea and China? Abe's foreign policy has now reached a crossroads.

(8) ODA that will lead to independence needed

ASAHI (Page 15) (Abridged)
March 27, 2007

Japan's official development assistance (ODA) program marked a turning point last year. The government has established the Council for Overseas Economic Cooperation (composed of the prime minister and four cabinet ministers) and a system to allow the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to exclusively handle ODA projects, including yen loans. This article searches for the best modality for ODA by looking into projects in Uganda and India.

The people of Uganda have lived on bananas, cassavas, corn, millet, and other crops that can grow with little rain. Rice has also long been popular in the country.

JICA agricultural specialist Tatsushi Tsuboi, 57, has been in Uganda for three years endeavoring to popularize the New Rice for Africa (NERICA) to improve the country's food situation. The NERICA rice, a hybrid of Asian and African varieties, is resistant to drought and produces abundant yields.

Tsuboi, who has been assisting in rice farming in developing

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countries for three decades, described NERICA rice as a variety capable of bringing changes to farming villages in Africa. Rice fetches high prices in the market. Tsuboi believes NERICA will bring hard cash to the farmers and help improve their livelihoods. He has lectured farmers on the importance of mastering threshing and polishing skills to produce value-added rice.

A 54-year-old farmer in Kikoko, north of the country's capital of Kampala, has begun growing NERICA with a paddy from the agricultural experimental station where Tsuboi works. As a result, his annual income has tripled to 3 million shillings (about 210,000 yen). His family can now afford to eat rice from time to time.

India's economy has been growing rapidly driven by information technology (IT), while leaving behind the manufacturing and farming

industries. To dissolve the discrepancies, the country has begun launching efforts to improve its infrastructure.

A plan to build a 5,800-km cargo railway line connecting four major cities is a prime example. Even half of the project would cost 700 billion yen. A Railways Ministry adviser expressed his eagerness to

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complete the project in several years. JICA, which has been pushing ahead with the development and survey for the project, is also eager to reform the country's distribution system, with an eye on railways and ports, as well.

Building railways would help reduce dependence on automobiles, thus preventing environmental pollution. The government is about to launch its new ODA program that is omni-directional, based on yen loans, and friendly to the environment.

Shifting weight from Asia

Japan's ODA that started as part of the government's postwar reparation for Asia has two unique features: an emphasis on Asia and yen loans for improving infrastructure.

In 1970, Asia accounted for 98% of bilateral assistance. The ratio has dropped to one-third due to the economic growth of Southeast Asia and China.

The weight has been shifted to the Middle East and Latin America rather than to Africa, however. Africa's ratio has been about 11% over the last two decades.

At the 2005 Asian-African Conference, then Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi pledged to double Japan's assistance to Africa in three years. Japan is not allowed to throw the international pledge into the wastebasket just because the country's financial situation is tight.

Enhancing human security is one of Japan's diplomatic pillars. The idea is to realize the development and stability of society by maximizing individual abilities.

In that context, Japan must expand assistance to Africa. Given the fact that 70% of the people in Africa live in farming villages, disseminating NERICA rice is directly linked to human security.

Another feature - yen-loan-oriented ODA projects -- has drawn criticism from Western countries as self-centered assistance intended to promote Japanese industries. In fact, the ratio of Japan's grant aid is the lowest among the major aid donors.

Given Asia's growth and Africa's stagnation, there has emerged a move to reevaluate the significance of yen loans. "Loans are more effective than simple grant aid because the former comes with pressure for repayments," an official explained.

The question is not about which is better between grant aid and loans but about what is most effective in helping aid-receiving countries to become independent.

Japan was the world's largest aid provider for the decade from 1991, but the country was overtaken by the United States in 2001 due to its financial constraints. Such countries as Britain and Germany might also surpass Japan in several years.

In order to gain a respectable position in the world, Japan must offer a helping hand actively to other countries.

(9) Metal products processed in North Korea imported under guise of Chinese products: Two companies searched

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Evening, March 27, 2007

The Hyogo Prefectural Police and Kobe Customhouse today searched the offices of Fitting Kuze, a steel pipe manufacturer located in Tsubata Town, Ishikawa Prefecture, and Koyo Corporation, a trading

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company in the Ukyo Ward, Kyoto, on suspicion of violation of the Foreign Exchange and Trade Law (import without approval) by allegedly importing metal products processed in North Korea under guise of Chinese products. The government has placed a total ban on imports from North Korea as a sanction for conducting a nuclear test last October. Judging that the two companies have imported low-priced products processed in North Korea via China, the prefectural police are hearing circumstances from their executives.

According to the investigation, the two companies allegedly imported joints for stainless pipes processed in North Korea under guise of Chinese products without obtaining approval from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry. The shipment arrived in the Kobe Port.

The government last October placed a total ban on imports from North Korea as a sanction. In November, METI issued a notification on a ban on imports of products processed in the North on a consignment basis with materials sent from Japan.

(10) Past records of the three military comfort women, who twisted US Ambassador to Japan Schieffer around their little fingers

SHUKAN SHINCHO (Page 62) (Full)

April 5, 2007

An alarming situation has developed. In connection with a resolution presented to the US House of Representatives calling on Japan to formally apologize for the comfort-women issue, three former comfort women appeared to testify at a hearing. The US ambassador to Japan later remarked that he "respected" their testimonies. However, the women who got the ambassador to believe their stories had changed their testimonies many times in the past, and doubts have been cast about their credibility.

(The ambassador said:) "I think that they were coerced to engage prostitution. That means they were raped by the Japanese military at that point in time."

If US Ambassador Schieffer's comment, as quoted in the New York Times (March 17, electronic edition), is true, one can only say that he has been twisted around someone's little finger.

You see, the stories told by the three former military comfort women who appeared at the House of Representatives hearing on Feb. 15 had changed like the wind many times until then. That is because they are all women with a past.

First, modern historian Ikuhiko Hata teaches us about Lee Yong-soo, the Korean woman:

"She first appeared in an open forum as former comfort woman in 1992. At the time, she explained the details of her having become a comfort woman by saying, "In the fall, when I was a full 16 years old, I was shown a red one-piece dress and leather shoes by a Japanese man who was wearing a civilian wartime uniform and a combat hat. It made me happy, so I left home without my mother knowing about it.' In the recent hearing, she chattered on about it the same

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way.

"She has come many times to Japan, including several times this year already. I attended her press conferences. In February, she said that Japanese soldiers had broken into her home, grabbed her by the neck, and dragged her off. In March, she again changed her story, saying that a soldier had gagged her and led her off at sword's point. Essentially, there are two stories: her leaving home on her own and her being carried off by force."

Comfort woman even after the war?

There is also another suspicious aspect of former comfort woman Lee's background to point out. There are three different ages that she gives for when she was recruited: 14, 15, and 16 years old. She says, "In 1944, when I was 16, I was carried off to Taiwan and forced to live as a comfort woman for three years." But this means that she continued to work as a comfort woman even after the war ended.

Next, Hata speaks about the other Korean woman, Kim Koon-ja, as well:

"Some times, she recalls that she had lost her parents at an early age and was adopted. She was told to go work as a servant and was sent off on a train. Other times, she recalls that two Koreans came to her home and that they fooled her into thinking she was going to work at a factory. At any rate, her story is close to leaving home on her own. There was no coercive recruitment by the Japanese military."

Moreover, regarding Jan Ruff O'Herne, who was then a Dutch citizen but is now an Australian, political journalist Nobuaki Hanaoka says:

"This incident occurred on the Japanese occupied island of Java in Indonesia. Some soldiers forced dozens of Dutch women to engage in prostitution, but the military found out about it and closed down the brothel. In other words, this incident can be categorized as proving that prostitution was prohibited by the military."

If such were the cases, why did the US ambassador swallow their stories whole cloth? Hanaoka sees it this way: "There is also the aspect of reporter Ohnishi of the New York Times, which is famous for taking anti-Japanese stances, having cleverly drawn out the comment."

Hata notes:

"Japan has not retorted, so the public, having erroneous views, has been aroused in the United States. I am at a loss for words, but this shows failure in our diplomatic strategy."

Outside Japan, various "sakura" (cherry blossoms/decoys) are blossoming madly.

SCHIEFFER